

Sūrah 98

Al-Bayyinah

(The Clear Proof)

(Madīnan Period)

Title

The opening word of the *Sūrah*, *al-bayyinah* (the clear proof) constitutes its title.

Period of Revelation

There is some contention as to whether this *Sūrah* is Makkan or Madīnan. Some Qur'ānic scholars describe it as Makkan and others as Madīnan. Interestingly, both adduce their respective opinions as the consensus view. Ibn al-Zubayr and 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār speak of it as Madīnan. Two opposing views are ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās and Qatādah. 'Ā'ishah regards it as Makkan. In his *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* Abū Ḥayyān and in his *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* 'Abd al-Mun'im ibn al-Faras endorse the same view. There is, however, no textual reference in the *Sūrah* to indicate whether it is Makkan or Madīnan.

Subject Matter and Themes

Its placement next to *Sūrahs al-'Alaq* and *al-Qadr* is of much significance. *Sūrah al-'Alaq* contains the earliest revelation; *Sūrah al-Qadr* specifies when it was revealed and this *Sūrah* explains why a Messenger was sent down along with the Book.

The *Sūrah* first describes the rationale behind the advent of a Messenger. It is stressed that the unbelievers, be they from among the People of the Book or polytheists, could not see the right way without being guided by a Messenger. He was to present before them the Book of Allah in its pristine purity, free from all the corruption that had vitiated earlier Scriptures. Next, the errors of the People of the Book are taken up. They did not go astray because of lack of divine guidance. Rather, they deviated from the truth even in the face of such guidance imparted to them. They are solely responsible for their errors. If they persist in their evil ways, even after the advent of Allah's Final Messenger, their accountability for their errors will be all the more aggravated.

All the Messengers and Scriptures instruct man that he should turn wholly to serving Allah, while abandoning all else. Man should not associate anyone in worshipping and serving Him, he should also establish Prayer and pay *Zakāh*. All along, this has been the true faith. This itself clarifies that all the accretions adopted by the People of the Book are false, as they betray deviation from the right way. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) now invites them to revert to the true faith.

Finally, it is asserted that those People of the Book and polytheists who reject the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) will be reckoned as "the worst of creatures", and they will abide for ever in Hellfire. By the same token, those who embrace faith, work righteous deeds and lead lives while fearing Allah stand out as "the best of creatures". Their reward will be their eternal abode in Paradise. Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him.